

Suffering

vs.

Death

SUFFERING vs. DEATH

SIN'S ENTRANCE resulted in two distinct penalties, *suffering* and *death*. One affects our *souls*, and brings pain, the other our *spirits*, and deprives of life. The same was true of our Lord, in dealing with sin. For six hours He suffered the agonies of crucifixion; then He yielded up His spirit and entered the death state. So, also, will it be in the judgment of the unbeliever. At the great white throne there will be inflictions on every human *soul* which effects evil (Rom.2:9), and this is followed by the second death, which recalls their *spirits*.

According to popular teaching one would think that suffering alone is needed to deal with sin, so that death performs no important part in God's plan to restore His creatures to Himself. But a closer reading of the first judgment scene, in Eden, may give us a clue as to the part that it plays in God's program. There we find that *grief* is given to Adam for what he has *done*, yet *death* is his portion for what he has *become*: He was to suffer "till you return to the ground, for from it were you taken, for soil you are, and to soil shall you return" (Gen.3:19). Adam *suffers* for the sin he has *committed* yet he *dies* for what he *is*.

Yahweh formed Adam of soil from the ground (Gen.2:7). The breath of life was directly imparted by God, and could be withdrawn by Him. Should He do this to His creatures, all would expire (Job 34:14). The result of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to be two-fold. There was to be a painful process—*dying*—and an

unconscious condition—*death*. The first was for the *deed*, the second for its *effect*. Adam became like fruit plucked from a tree. It undergoes a process of putrefaction and then returns to the soil from which it came. The life of the fruit comes from its connection with the tree. So humanity's life depends on its connection with God. Now that this is broken, for all are estranged from the life of God (Eph.4:18), they die, *whatever their deeds may be*, unless the connection is reestablished.

This is expanded in the sentence. First the dying process is enlarged upon. The ground is cursed, so that man's portion would be grief and sweat for the remainder of his life. Then, because the vital connection with God had been broken—as was clearly indicated by their hiding themselves from His presence—this would be followed by death. Their suffering was a consequence of their act. But their death is especially explained as resulting from the condition into which they had come. They were now—figuratively speaking—soil. As soon as the vitality they possessed was used up, they would actually return to the soil. This dying condition, or mortality, has been passed on to their posterity, so that all die, not because of what they *do*, but because of what they *are*.

We may see the same distinction, with further light, in Paul's wonderful words concerning our salvation and reconciliation in the fifth of Romans. There we find that *Christ* died for *sinners* for their *salvation*, yet the death of God's *Son* for His *enemies* was needed for their *reconciliation*. "Sinners" and "died" refer to specific *acts*, while "enemies" and "death" refer to *states*. In one case it is a question of what we *do* and what Christ *did*. In the other it is rather what we *were* and what He *became*.

The difficulty for most of us here is to distinguish between *dying* and *death*, the *act* and the *state*. One is usually a painful process, the other an unconscious con-

dition. It may help us to see this by considering the other contrastive terms in this passage, for they all agree in distinguishing between *doing* and *being*. Christ is set over against the Son, sinners against enemies, dying against death, His blood against His life, and justification against reconciliation.

Christ is a title which depends upon His "activities" as Prophet, Priest, and King. In the beginning, though we may speak of Him as such in anticipation, He was not a Christ, as He fulfilled none of these functions. So also in the consummation. When God is All in all, there will be no Prophet or Priest or King needed, so the office will cease. Not so with the appellation "Son." That is not dependent on what He *does*, but on what He *is*. Before the eons He was God's Son, and He will continue to be subject as such after the consummation. The distinctions dominate this passage.

Sinners are those who commit sin. We have been confused as to this by the teaching that sin is a "principle" (whatever that is) which indwells us, and leads us to sin. This doubtless arose from a misunderstanding of the figure where sin is personified. An enemy may be such without committing overt offenses. Enmity arises from what we are, rather than what we do. It is concerned with our attitude rather than with our acts. Even though we do nothing to offend, we may be enemies. But if we do not sin, we are not sinners.

Dying and death are likewise differentiated. One who is dying ceases to do so when he enters death. So long as the process continues, sensation is possible, and it is usually accompanied by suffering. As soon as the process is concluded, sensation vanishes, and suffering is impossible. Our Lord did not only die on the cross for six hours, for our salvation. He also entered death until the third

day for our reconciliation. This distinction should aid us to clarify some important problems.

Our Lord was not like us in His life. He was not continually dying as we are. He never would have died a "natural" death. His "mortal life" was limited to the six hours of His suffering on the cross, unless we wish to include the bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane and the stripes given by the soldiers, all of which robbed Him of blood. All of this suffering is linked with the *process* which *precedes* the death state and ceases when life is extinct. Surely our Lord did not suffer during the interval between His death and His resurrection! All suffering, all judging, must be in life, not in death.

In human judgments this distinction is usually sharply maintained. Many are the sentences which involve suffering. But when a crime is committed deserving of death, strange as it seems, it is usual in civilized countries to make this as painless as possible. The whole basis of judging is different. In one case punishment is inflicted in some measure corresponding to the crime committed, as a retribution or correction. But in the other the extreme penalty removes the offender from society, since he is not deemed fit to live because of what he is. These motives may not be clearly indicated in faulty human adjudication, but even the two kinds of penalties are fairly clear.

The figure of Christ's *blood*, which preserves for us the permanent values of Christ's sufferings, is in contrast with the *life* of the Son. As *sinner*s, we are saved now because He suffered when *dying*. As *enemies*, we are reconciled because He entered *death*. But both are made good to us in very different ways. His *soul* was given for us when He suffered. As the soul is in the blood, it remains as a permanent token. His *life* was given for us in death, but He has taken it again, and we are saved by His resurrection life. One speaks of a past act, the other of a present condition,

even as all the other factors in these marvelous formulas.

The *justification* of sinners by *blood* is set over against the *reconciliation* of enemies by *death*, the *acts* of the sinners and the *suffering* of Christ against the *attitude* of enemies and the *death* of the Son. This contrast is further enforced by the whole context. Before this we have the justification of sinners by blood. In the following chapters we have not only Christ's dying for us, but His death and *our* death with Him. What we have *done* has been provided for in the first four chapters of Romans. What we *are* is before us in the succeeding chapters. And here, notwithstanding our justification by grace, we enter death with Christ. Not only are our sins judged, but *we* are condemned to endure the extreme penalty in figure.

The first judgment in Eden, the judgment of the believer in Romans, and that of the unbeliever in the Unveiling, run along parallel lines. In all three there is suffering for the act of sin, and death for the fact of estrangement. In Genesis this is expressed by the word *soil*. Adam had been created a living *soul*. After his offense he is called *soil*, in opposition to God, Who is spirit. In the expressive language of figures, the reason for Adam's death was that he was soil. And this also accounts for the necessity we have of reckoning ourselves dead, and for the fact that, after the great white throne judgment of the acts of mankind, there follows the casting into death, through which alone they can reach reconciliation at the consummation.

We should have no more difficulty in connection with the second death after the judging of the great white throne than we have with our own death with Christ (in figure) in Romans six after having been justified in His blood. Even after we have been set right as to our acts we must die because of what we are. Even after being justified by His blood we must be reconciled by His death. Even after our sins are settled we ourselves descend into the tomb in

order that we may live in newness of life. As with the saint, so with the sinner. The judging may justify them, but death is needed in order to reconcile.

JUDGING AND JUDGMENT

In the original there are two words for judgment, *JUDG*-ing *krisis* and *JUDG*ment *krima*. The latter is the sentence (Luke 24:20), the former its execution. As much confusion comes from failing to see that we are dealing with a process when *krisis* is used, because it is rendered "judgment," I have disfigured this article by using "judging" when this distinction is important. The Scriptures speak of the day of judging (Matt.10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36,41,42; Jude 6). There can be no judging in death, so the dead are roused. The judging at the great white throne ceases when the second death appears. I once thought that the great white throne simply determined the judgment or sentence, and that the judging was in the second death. The English vocabulary is defective in regard to these important matters, so we hope to have the sympathy and forbearance of our readers as we seek to remedy its shortcomings.

The judging before the great white throne is concerned with *acts* (Rev.20:12,13). The tendency is for us to look upon the second death as a part of this judging and deduce that those whose acts warranted it would enter the second death. But there is no reference to acts when the second death is mentioned. On the contrary, there are two sets of scrolls. One set contains the *acts* of those before the great white throne, and determines the judging. The other relates to *life*. If anyone was not written in this, he was cast into the lake of fire. The second death is not the penalty for acts, but the result of their condition.

This should help us in our meditations on kindred themes. We are inclined to reason out the destiny of various classes of mankind from their acts or their "responsibility." But the

acts of men seem to play a very minor part in the plan of God. All who believe are saved, whatever they have committed, though, of course, they receive a reward or lose it on account of their doings. And all who do not believe are lost, no matter what they have accomplished, though, to be sure, they are judged according to their deeds. It is what we *are* in Adam and what we *become* in Christ, and not our acts, which decides our destiny. Faith, even though it is mixed with evidential works, is essential. Works are not.

To some extent we can see this in the first death. As a rule men do not die because of their sinful deeds. The innocent babe expires before it has had much opportunity to sin.¹ And many a desperate criminal lives a long life of evil. The act of sinning, or the amount, does not necessarily determine the length of life. That depends on vitality to a much greater extent. If we keep these two distinct it will remove many apparent contradictions in life as well as in the Scriptures.

As a matter of fact death cannot be the direct penalty of ill-doing, for it comes to an enormous proportion of the human race who, because of their youth, are incapable of much evil. Billions upon billions of infants and children have fallen under the scythe of the grim reaper who were, in our estimation, quite innocent of any evil action. In fact, it has become a proverb that "the good die young." So also with life. Good deeds have but little effect upon it. And a whole life of benevolence does not overcome mortality. The greatest philanthropist must die. So it is with the first death and so it will be with the second, for the underlying

1. While still a child myself I was called upon to witness the out-breathing of an infant brother, dead before he was able to distinguish right from wrong. Later I had the heart-breaking experience of watching an aged and beloved brother in Christ in his last gasps, though he was one of the most just and gracious men I have ever known.

principles in each case are the same. Death and life are not the result of human activities, but of divine disposing, due to man's *condition*, not his deeds.

It is nearly half a century since we first preached the gospel on the street, seeking to set forth the blood of Christ for our sins and the life of God's Son for our enmity (Rom.5:8-10). Here God is recommending His love to us, and again and again have I returned to this passage. It marks a turn in the apostle's argument. It changes over from justification to reconciliation. He has dealt with our deeds; now he takes up our condition.

Since eonian life was promised to those enduring in good acts (Rom.2:7), we might reason that one who is justified certainly must receive it simply because of that fact. Yet life is not even mentioned in the section dealing with justification. Not until we are occupied with reconciliation, do we read of the grace that reigns *through* righteousness, for eonian *life* (Rom.5:21). The fact that we are justified does not give us life. So also, at the great white throne, we might expect that, when judgment has done its work, then reconciliation will immediately follow. But, in both cases, *death* must first come in to deal with what we *are* before *life* can be given. Romans five, six, and seven must follow for the believer, and the second death for the unbeliever.

Most of us have put ourselves mentally under law, as though the law were given to us to provide one way to life, which will not function on account of our sin. But that is a mere unfounded inference, a deduction from the negative, which is illogical. *The law could not give life*, even if it had been kept. "If a law were given able to vivify, really, righteousness would be out of law" (Gal.3:21). The fact that it promised life to those who kept it does not prove that it could, for the promise was made by One Who knew that no one could or would stand the test. It was given in order to make this very fact clear in practical experience. Law,

or human activity, is not capable of producing life.

To go back to the enigmatical utterances of the Mosaic economy to prove the opposite would only show that we have not yet learned the lesson it was meant to teach. "This do and thou shalt live" is perfectly true as it stands, yet most misleading when united with the premise of human ability. To one who knows the infirmity of humanity there is nothing in it to which we may object. It is only a very wise way of teaching the fact of human frailty by withholding a part of the truth. But if we are under the delusion that man *can* earn life by doing what God demands, then, indeed, there seems to be a promise made which cannot be fulfilled, and which is therefore lacking in good faith.

The epistle to the Romans, being addressed to the saints, and with quite the opposite intent from the enactments of Sinai, differs from the law in that it leaves us in no doubt as to the vanity of human effort. It does indeed, widen the scope of the law so as to include the acts of all mankind who seek the best (Rom. 2:7), and promises them eonian life. This, corresponding to the law, would mean that such would not die, but live on. It can hardly be stretched to include resurrection or vivification, for these cannot be the fruit of human endeavor. But in Romans the apostle does not leave us in uncertainty but goes right on to prove from the Scriptures themselves that no one comes within this category. Until the Psalmist's day the Scriptures gave no clear intimation that none fulfilled the terms of the law, but Paul does not close this section of the epistle without showing that *not one* is seeking God, hence none would escape death by seeking or doing.

"THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH"

The *ration* of Sin is death (Rom.6:23). The slave of Sin receives *rations*, not *wages*. He is not hired but fed. The usual word for wages *misthos* is not used here, but one

derived from the word PROVISION *opsōnion*. John the Baptist told the soldiers to be sufficed with their rations (Luke 3:14). Paul asks, Who is warring supplying his own rations? (1 Cor.9:7). He received rations, not wages, for dispensing the evangel (2 Cor.11:8). It is the continual allowance of food needed for sustenance, not the final reward for work. Sin, personified, deals out death right along to its slaves. It is not God Who pays wages for sin. Sin receives no *wages*, even from God, for it is not worthy of reward. Has not this misleading rendering led us totally astray here?

I labored long under the impression that this passage sufficed to prove that the sins of men would be settled by their death. I did not realize that this practically did away with judgment. If their death, like an execution, is the penalty of their sins, then why should they be roused to be judged before the great white throne? And why should they suffer affliction and distress (Rom.2:9) if they have already received the wages of sin in their first death? Moreover, why should they die twice, not only before the judgment, but also in the second death? Is it not clear that neither of these deaths is the wages or penalty of sins, but that these are dealt with in the interval between them, not in death, but while they are in the resurrection of judgment?

This conclusion is put beyond question once we note the position of this passage in the book of Romans. Sins, judgment, and justification come before us in the first four chapters. Thereafter the subject is conciliation. The special context from which this phrase is taken does not deal with the sins of unbelievers, but with our slavery under Sin in the past and our freedom from Sin now, especially the fruit which we have in each case. What did we get for slaving for Sin? Death. Now we slave for God and get life. The question of future judgment, or of sin's penalty at the last, is not before us in this passage at all. We have misused it blindly in order to support a doctrine which has no scriptural basis.

I once was quite concerned about the justice of the second death. If the judgment of the great white throne righted all wrongs, why should it be followed by "the wages of sin?" Indeed, why have a judgment, when those who suffer in it return to the death state, from which they have just emerged? That the judgment really deals with the *acts* of mankind, and all are judged according to their *deeds*, so that *these* no longer interfere with their salvation or reconciliation, appears to be beyond all doubt. Like almost everyone else, I did not know that there was still a vital hindrance. Those who stand before the great white throne will not be *vivified* there, but merely *raised* from the dead. They are still mortal. And it is this, what they *are*, rather than what they have *done*, which calls for the second death and the subsequent vivification. Hence we do not read that those who have not *done* well are doomed to die again. Nor do we read that those who have *done* well are spared the general fate. But an entirely different scroll is brought in, the scroll of *life*, and this only as a negative witness in regard to those who are *not* enrolled within it.

SOUL AND SPIRIT

Judgment is on every human *soul* which is effecting evil (Rom.2:9), while death is the withdrawal of the *spirit*. Hence they belong to two entirely distinct realms, with altogether divergent characteristics. Death, as such, cannot vary in degree, hence could never be the basis of a just judgment. The infant is no less dead than the confirmed criminal. In the judgment the needed sufferings will vary in accord with the sins committed. While the judgment is according to the acts and affects the soul, the death does not vary at all, and withdraws the spirit. Not being determined by acts, death must follow on other grounds. Just as in the first death it depends on the stock of vitality or life, not on conduct, so in the second. Figuratively, the "dead"

stand before the great white throne. This shows what they *are*, and is the basis for the second death.

The common idea that the death state is the "penalty" due to acts of sin, and, when endured, justifies from them, seems to be supported by some passages of Scripture, when they are taken out of their context. But when we remember that almost all enter the death state, saint as well as sinner, good as well as bad, and that in it there is no consciousness, no possibility of experiencing evil, no means of executing judgment, or setting wrongs right, it is evident that it does not displace judgment, and is not the adjudication of evil deeds. Even after men have died, either for bad or good deeds (for some are killed while performing noble acts), they must be roused out of death in order to be judged. And when they return to the death state they have been judged and are all past the need of any further "penalty," hence do not enter the second death on account of their acts of sin any more than the infant or hero is swallowed up in the first.

TEMPORAL AND FINAL JUDGMENT

One of the most helpful distinctions that arise from a correct cutting of the Word of truth is in discriminating God's judgments of men and nations during their lifetime, on the earth, on many occasions, especially at the crisis of the eons, before the day of Yahweh, and that single session at the great white throne, where every individual unbeliever, after his death, in the absence of the earth, is judged for all the acts he has done in the flesh. Those who mix the preceding judgments into this "final judgment" can never have a clear apprehension of God's ways with mankind. In the same way it will help to separate the infliction of death on some occasions from the death state, which comes to all, with few exceptions, no matter what their conduct may have been. Let us not con-

fuse God's dealings with men in life with His judging at the great white throne.

The place *where* a passage occurs is often of vital value in its true interpretation. Our reprehensible habit of isolating a text from its context is the cause of much error. So it is with the popular quotation, "the wages of sin is death." As a motto on the wall it may impart a thought quite different from that we receive when reading it in Romans. It is not given as a part of the "gospel" to frighten sinners, nor does it deal with the justification or salvation of the sinner, but with the walk of the saint. Sin is personified, and set forth as a slaveholder whom we once served (and may still serve) who gives no *wages* at all, but only that which is necessary to sustain us in his service, that is, death, just as God graciously gives us life, apart from which we could not serve Him. The wall text means that, if any man sins, he will die in the future, which is a misleading half truth. The scriptural text speaks of the present condition of those who slave for sin.

As I had been taught that the judgment of sin is death, and thought that such Scriptures as "the wages of sin is death" substantiated this teaching (as I imagine this rendering was intended to do), I found much difficulty in seeing God's justice in His judgment. If everyone suffers death, the extreme penalty, for his sins, from the most innocent infant to the worst confirmed criminal, how could there be any real justice? How could the "punishment" (as I then thought it) fit each case? If death is the penalty there can be no degrees nor, indeed, any real "judgment" at all, for this word, in the original, denotes the process of righting what is wrong. It took years before I learned that judging is an entirely distinct matter from death.

History complains of the unjustness of medieval laws which provided the death penalty for minor offenses, but men have never gone so far as to attach it to every sin and

to every person. If death is the judging for sins, then God is far more unjust than men. Moreover, then resurrection is unnecessary and judging futile torture. If the *judging*, based on acts, at the great white throne, leads to the sentence of death, it accomplishes nothing, for they have all come out of death. Moreover, if *death* was the judging for sin they should not have been raised, and a vivification from the second death is not admissible.

But if men die because of what they *are*, and if death is *not* their judging, then they must be raised and adjudicated. Again, if they are judged after being roused, at the great white throne, and not in the second death, then that death is not their judging at all, and there is no necessity that it should continue, so far as their acts are concerned. The only thing that holds them in death is their condition. This, however, is radically altered by not merely *raising* or *rousing* them, but by making them immortal by *vivification*, so there can be no objection to making all alive, either on the score of sins committed or because they are soil. They have been judged for their sins, and they are no longer soil, but spirit, that is, are immortal, and cannot die or sin again.

Here we touch one of the great problems of the future which is usually ignored. The fact that past sins are forgiven or justified gives no guarantee that men will not continue to sin, even after being raised from the dead. Much more than judging is necessary to make us fit for glory. What we *are* makes us sin. Our mortality is the cause of our offenses. Only the opposite of death, vivification, can deal with the "root" of sin. We will be made sinless by being made alive, by being given immortality. The unbelievers will still be "dead" when they stand before the great white throne in the judging. Hence they are not fit for the glory even after they have been judged. It is their vivification at the consummation, which changes them and gives them immor-

tality, which makes them fit for God's presence and glory, and forever fends all possibility of further offense.

Some object to the long time period between the judging and the consummation. Why is the sinner not immediately reconciled? Why must he wait so unutterably long before he is vivified? The answer is simple: he does not wait at all. To his consciousness, his experience, he is made alive right after the judging at the great white throne. That is what the second death is for—to eliminate the last eon from the consciousness of the unbeliever, so that he is oblivious of its existence. So far as he is concerned he goes from the great white throne judging into the *conscious* enjoyment of immortality.

The reaction to eternal torment led from one error into another. Without making it very clear, the argument was propounded that the wages of sin is *death*, not *suffering*. But this passage does not speak of the "wages" or penalty of sin, but of the *rations*, that which Sin gives to its slaves to support them. It is not a judgment on sin. Logically this view does away with judging, for it does not set anything right, and really has no place for the great white throne or the second death, as these only leave mankind as they found it. But death is not the penalty for sinful deeds as a whole. Only a few severe crimes have this penalty attached in law, either divine or human. And even then it is not death, but violent death before the time, which is meant, for all would die in due time, even if not guilty of any crime.

Had the truth as to the death state *and its cause* not been lost, such errors as eternal torment and annihilation would never have distorted the doctrine of the church, and led it in devious and dark avenues of error, so that the whole subject of future judgment became a hideous nightmare. Much was gained with the recovery of the truth that death is not life. But this failed to separate death and judging, so that, while the intolerable terrors of eternal torment were

shown to be unscriptural, the gross injustice connected with judgment was not removed. The death penalty was extended to every peccadillo, and the infant received the same penalty as the murderer. It is only when we keep death entirely distinct from judging that justice can prevail and God be vindicated.

The great truth that death comes because of what we *are* through Adam irrespective of what we have *done* as a result of it, is worthy of our deepest consideration and most energetic propagation. Like that other illuminating discovery that mortality, not sin, is transmitted from Adam (Rom.5:12), it answers innumerable questions and removes countless difficulties in which theology has been wallowing for centuries. Everything which seemed to be unjust or unequal in God's future dealings vanishes. Men are neither responsible nor answerable for death, for they (apart from Adam) did not introduce it, nor can they control it. So that righteousness, as well as love, demands that, once death has done its duty, it must be discarded. And this is precisely what God will do at the consummation (1 Cor.15:26).

Perhaps nothing so clouds our conceptions of God's righteousness as the failure to distinguish death from judging, and the widespread conviction that it is the penalty for our sinful acts. If everyone dies on account of his sins, they all are treated alike, which is manifestly wrong. We may look forward to the judgment, but if this, again, is only a tribunal, and its sentence is the second death, after which there is no resurrection, the same grave difficulty confronts us. Just adjudication is not possible. It is only as we keep *judging*, with its sufferings, carefully adjusted to suit each case, distinct from *death*, which comes to all alike quite independent of their careers, that we are able to vindicate the Judge of all the earth in His dealings with mankind.

A. E. Knoch

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